ID: 88081883

Box 24
24-30
Acc. 2

Complete Text of Speech of BLM Acting Director

Tom Fry

for the Public Lands Symposium
Sponsored by the Andrus Center for Public Policy
Boise State University
March 24, 1999

Introduction

It's a privilege and pleasure to be with you here today at this Andrus Center symposium on our Nation's public lands.

I would like to begin by quoting one of America's most successful politicians, who was interviewed last fall by the *Salt Lake Tribune*. In an article titled "Andrus: The Art of the Deal"*, the *Tribune* noted that over his 35-year political career, Cecil D. Andrus has earned respect from people on opposite sides of the political spectrum.

* Published October 26, 1998.

Why is that? It's simple, really. Besides bringing "the right stuff" to politics, Cecil Andrus understands that politics requires compromise. As he told the *Tribune*: "People have forgotten that politics is the art of compromise."

Governor Andrus -- remember, once a governor, always a governor -- also understands the appeal of the West. In his interview with the *Tribune*, he said: "I've always said the reason so many people live back East is because they don't know any better. Here in the West, we understand you need to first make a living, but then you have to have a life that's worth living."

I will return to Governor Andrus' comments at the end of my speech, which will focus on the subject of preserving open space.

Open Space: A National Issue Whose Time Has Come

Suburban sprawl, perhaps better known in Federal land-management circles as "wildland-urban interface," is coming to the fore as a national issue. In last fall's elections, more than 200 communities debated, and an overwhelming majority approved, measures aimed at controlling sprawl and enhancing livability by protecting open space.

To cite only two examples, one from each coast: in New Jersey, voters approved a measure -- backed by Republican Governor Christine Todd Whitman -- that will dedicate up to $98 million in tax revenues annually for conservation and historic preservation. Over 10 years, this measure will protect one million acres of New Jersey's remaining two million acres of open space.

In California's Ventura County, voters adopted a ballot initiative called SOAR (Save Open Space and Agricultural Resources), which requires proposed developments needing a zoning change to be approved by public referendum.

Clearly, "a great national debate" on sprawl has begun, as Richard Moe, President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, noted in a speech to the National Press Club on January 22. Moe, who titled his speech "The Sprawling of America," focused on what he called "the crucial role" of the Federal government in supporting "smart growth" policies at the state and local level. Later on I will discuss why I believe the mission of the Bureau of Land Management is, in fact, part of the solution.

The sprawl debate, Moe told the Press Club, "touches every aspect of our lives -- the quality of the natural and built environments, how we feel about the places where we live and work and play, how much time we have for our family and civic life, how rooted we are in our communities." Moreover, since "[s]prawl destroys the irreplaceable," he said, the outcome of this debate "will determine whether the American dream will become a reality for future generations."*

* "The Sprawling of America: Federal Policy is Part of the Problem: Can it Be Part of the Solution?," an address of Richard Moe, President, National Trust for Historic Preservation, to the National Press Club, Washington, D.C., January 22, 1999. Text of the speech is available from the National Trust for Historic Preservation (http://www.nationaltrust.org).

State and Local Efforts to Preserve Open Space

Is Moe overstating the case?

Utah

If so, one would have to ask why the Utah state legislature, among other legislative bodies, is taking the growth issue so seriously. On February 23, the Utah House, by a vote of 47-23, passed a bill (HB 119) called the Utah Quality Growth Act of 1999. In reporting on the bill's passage that day, Salt Lake City's *Deseret News* quoted House Majority Leader Kevin Garn as saying the bill has three main goals:

- to slow the inefficient use of land and the costs of infrastructure -- schools, roads, sewers -- that go with such inefficiency;

- to promote affordable housing, which Garn described as "part of the American Dream;"

- and to preserve green space and farm land.

Garn, a Republican, called growth "a bipartisan issue" and said the bill "is about enhancing and preserving the quality of life that we have all grown to know and love in the state of Utah." These sentiments were echoed by Rep. Ralph Becker, a Salt Lake City Democrat who helped move the bill through the Utah House. "There's a saying that you don't miss the water until your well is dry," Becker said. "That can be said about open space. When it comes to open space, you only have one chance to do this right."*

* "Growth Object of Bills in Legislature," the *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 24, 1999.

Utah lawmakers' constituents appear to share their view that growth needs to be managed, as polls show that nearly four of every five Utah citizens see growth as a threat to their quality of life.*

* As noted in the *Salt Lake Tribune* article cited above.

Nevada

The growth issue is being debated elsewhere in the West. In Nevada, Clark County local governments recently endorsed a bill, sponsored by Democratic state Sen. Dina Titus, that seeks to manage the explosive growth now taking place in the Las Vegas area. Titus, who calls her legislation (SB 191) the "Smart Growth Bill," said that for too long the "tail has been wagging the dog" when it comes to development, with infrastructure needs being considered only after development projects have been approved. "We're getting things in the right order," she told Nevada's Senate Government Affairs Committee.*

* From "Titus' bill to manage growth supported," the *Las Vegas Sun*, February 25, 1999.

Montana

And in Montana one reads headlines like this one from the *Billings Gazette*: "Legislator urges open space through controlled growth." The Gazette article focused on Senate Bill 383, sponsored by state Sen. Don Hargrove, a Republican, who said his legislation would help local governments concentrate development in certain areas while preserving other land for open space. "If we don't move forward, 20 years from now it won't be a problem because the land won't be there anymore," Hargrove told Montana's Senate State Administration Committee.*

* "Legislator urges open space through controlled growth," *Billings Gazette*, February 10, 1999.

The Administration's Open-Space Initiatives

The issue of "wildland-urban interface" is being taken seriously at the national level as well. The Clinton-Gore Administration has launched two major efforts related to managing growth and preserving space. Before describing some of the particulars of these initiatives, let me make

clear that in dealing with sprawl, the essence of the Federal role is that of supporting state and local efforts to manage growth. As Vice President Gore has put it: "...the Federal government's role should never be that of beauty commissar. ...But it is our job to work with states...to support their remarkable smart-growth efforts."*

* Remarks prepared for delivery by Vice President Al Gore, Livability Announcement, January 11, 1999. Accessible via the Internet from the White House Home Page (www.whitehouse.gov) at:
http://www.pub.whitehouse.gov/uri-res/I2R?urn:pdi://oma.eop.gov.us/1999/1/12/6.text.2

The first of these is the Administration's $1 billion **Lands Legacy Initiative**, which President Clinton and Vice President Gore unveiled on January 12. The President said the initiative seeks to "honor the core principle Theodore Roosevelt set out for us a hundred years ago; we will leave this magnificent country 'even a better land for our descendants than it is for us.'"

The Lands Legacy Initiative calls on Congress to allocate $442 million to preserve America's natural treasures. That includes enhanced protection of the Lewis and Clark Trail along the Missouri River and federal land acquisitions, including:

- 450,000 acres within and around California's Mojave and Joshua Tree National Parks;

- additional land within national forests and wildlife refuges in Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, and New York;

- land critical to ongoing Federal-state restoration efforts in the Everglades;

- and lands within Gettysburg, Antietam, and other historic battlefields.

In its initiative, the Administration is also calling on Congress to grant permanent wilderness protection to more than five million acres within the backcountry of Yellowstone, Grand Teton, Glacier, Great Smoky Mountain, Cumberland Gap, and 12 other national parks and monuments.

The Lands Legacy Initiative would also provide $588 million to state and local governments, private land trusts, and other non-profit groups to protect open space. That funding would include:

- $150 million in matching grants for land or easements for urban parks, greenways, outdoor recreation, wetlands, and wildlife habitat;

- $50 million in matching grants for open-space planning, and $10 million that would support $50 million in low-interest loans to rural areas for "smart growth" planning and development;

- $50 million to protect threatened farm land and open space;

- and $40 million to maintain and expand urban and community parks and forests.

The Administration's second major open-space effort is its **Livability Agenda for the 21st Century**, which Vice President Gore announced on January 11. This initiative includes "Better America Bonds," a new financing tool that would leverage nearly $10 billion over five years for actions by state and local governments to preserve green space and improve water quality. As part of its Livability Agenda, the Administration has also called for $6.1 billion to encourage communities to invest in mass transit and develop alternatives to building more clogged highways, and $1.6 billion to support state and local efforts aimed at reducing air pollution and easing traffic congestion.

The BLM: Part of the Solution

The subtitle of Richard Moe's speech on sprawl was: "Federal Policy Is Part of the Problem; Can It Be Part of the Solution?" The answer, of course, is an emphatic "Yes," provided that this Federal role is seen essentially as one that supports state and local efforts to manage growth.

But let me point out that the Bureau of Land Management, which administers more Federal land than any other agency (in fact, 48 percent of the Federal total acreage), is *already* protecting open space across 264 million acres of mostly Western public land.

The BLM does this by carrying out its core mission, which is to ensure the health and productivity of the public lands. More specifically, the BLM's mission is to accommodate multiple uses of the land, such as livestock grazing and outdoor recreation. *These activities require open space, and this means the preservation of open space is an inherent part of the BLM's mission. That's why I've told BLM employees that we are the Open Space agency.*

Preserving Open Space Through "Big Picture" Management

As part of its multiple-use mandate, the BLM must ensure that the various uses of the public lands are environmentally sound. Toward that end, the BLM takes a "Big Picture" or Landscape Management approach that sees the connections between soil, water, vegetation, animals, and man, and seeks to restore or maintain the health and productivity of entire landscapes. Of necessity, this approach requires coordination that transcends political boundaries, in recognition of the fact that nature itself pays no heed to administrative lines.

Accordingly, the BLM works with various partners -- individuals, agencies, and private organizations -- to fulfill its stewardship mission. These partnerships exemplify the BLM's "good neighbor" policy that promotes collaborative decisionmaking with parties at the state, local, Tribal, and national levels.

Let me cite two examples of the Bureau's Landscape Management approach. One is the **Southwest Strategy**, under which the Departments of Interior and Agriculture are working with state, county, and Tribal governments to protect environmental, cultural, and economic resources in New Mexico and Arizona. This strategy is aimed at resolving such issues as timber harvesting, water management, and livestock grazing, which have been the subject of an increasing number of lawsuits in the Southwest. For its part in this effort, the BLM has focused on maintaining and restoring riparian areas and protecting habitat for endangered species.

Another Landscape Management effort is the **Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project**, which the Departments of Interior and Agriculture developed in order to prevent the kind of resource gridlock that occurred in the Pacific Northwest before implementation of the President's Northwest Forest Plan. The project addresses natural resource issues that transcend the 74 BLM and Forest Service administrative boundaries in the basin, such as forest and rangeland health and habitat for anadromous fish.

Responding to public and congressional concerns over the project's Draft Environmental Impact Statements, Secretaries Babbitt and Glickman made a commitment last October to Congress to narrow its scope. The departments are now working on a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement that will reflect that commitment; the supplement is expected to be ready for public review this summer.

Landscape Management represents a break with the past, when conservation meant dividing the landscape into protected and unprotected areas. But the old divide-up-the-landscape approach, while right for its time, is no longer viable. As Secretary Babbitt has said: "At the threshold of the 21st century, we've come to understand that ...everything relates" in nature. And therefore the focus must be *restoration*, "[b]ecause watersheds and river systems and native fish can't survive in a segment[ed] landscape where we protect the back 40 and do as we please on the front 40."*

* From Secretary's remarks to the Trout Unlimited Annual Conference in Reno, Nevada, on August 12, 1998.

The BLM carries out Landscape Management in a manner consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), which calls for the conservation *and* development of public land resources. While conservation and development appear to be contradictory, they are actually complementary because people need jobs *and* a healthy environment, meaning **healthy land, clean air, and clean water**.

Moreover, conserving natural resources produces economic benefits -- by attracting tourists and, what's even more important, permanent residents. This is confirmed by *Money* magazine, which published its 12th annual ranking of the "best places to live in America" in July 1998. In its survey of 500 households across the country, the magazine said the top five factors cited by

people in choosing a place to live are, in order of priority: clean water, low crime, clean air*, good public schools, and low property taxes.

* The public's value of clean air was recently highlighted in a *Deseret News* article titled "Clean air is No. 1 priority for Utahns" (March 11, 1999). "The majority of Wasatch Front residents say clean air and availability of sufficient water are their top concerns for the future," the paper reported, citing the results of 17,000 returned questionnaires from a survey conducted by Envision Utah, a public-private partnership that is seeking to steer the state's growth in a favorable direction.

The powerful attraction of public lands explains why advertisements like this one appear in Western newspapers: "Spacious Mexican brick home overlooking Gila River valley [Arizona]. Hilltop location, nestled between Federal land and pristine wilderness area."* The price tag on this 14-year-old, three-bedroom, two-bath, one-story home: $500,000.

* From the classified ad section of the *Las Vegas Sun*, March 10, 1999.

Landscape Management is also a valuable tool in dealing with wildfire, which has become even more of a challenge as urban and suburban growth has extended to once-remote public lands. In fact, the wildland-urban interface phenomenon is evident right here in Boise, where local growth has reached the foothills of BLM-managed land.

Landscape Management encompasses Secretary Babbitt's "Fight Fire With Fire"* campaign that recognizes the essential, beneficial role that wildland fire plays in nature. This approach, which uses prescribed or controlled fire as a tool for reducing the fuels that feed fire, is particularly relevant at a time when wildland fires have been getting hotter, bigger, and faster, posing a greater risk to homes located near the wide open spaces of BLM public lands.

* "A Coordinated Campaign: Fight Fire With Fire," speech of Secretary Babbitt at Boise State University, February 11, 1998. Speech is accessible via the Internet at: http://www.doi.gov/alcove/boisfire.html

The fact is, *open space is basic to the West's history, and it is essential to the quality of life and lifestyle of Westerners.* That's why the BLM plays such a crucial role in preserving the West's quality of life -- because the Bureau manages and conserves more open space, including 5.2 million acres of Wilderness Areas, than any other government agency. In an increasingly urbanized West, the open spaces of BLM-managed lands offer what Professor Charles Wilkinson of the University of Colorado at Boulder calls "long vistas, places to get lost in and places to find yourself in...."

These places "to get lost in" include the 1.9 million-acre Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, which President Clinton designated in 1996. Perhaps as significant as the President's designation was his and Secretary Babbitt's decision to assign the BLM -- rather than

our better-known sister agency, the National Park Service -- to be the land manager of this spectacular, remote area in southern Utah.

The BLM's emphasis on being a good neighbor has been particularly evident in the way the Bureau has ensured local participation every step of the way in developing a long-term management plan for the Grand Staircase. From the outset, a collaborative decisionmaking process for the Monument has been guided by a first-rate interagency team that includes five professionals from the State of Utah, each selected by Utah Gov. Mike Leavitt.*

* Another excellent example of collaboration is the BLM's partnership with two small Utah communities (Ivins and Santa Clara). This partnership, which focuses on the management of some 8,000 acres of public land near St. George, Utah, will develop a management plan aimed at protecting natural and historical resources from vandalism, recreation-related damage, and encroaching urbanization.

Building on the already evident success of the Grand Staircase, Secretary Babbitt has been working with Sen. John McCain (R-Arizona) and other members of the Arizona delegation on protecting historical and scientific resources on 600,000 acres of public lands known as the Arizona Strip. The effort seeks to achieve through legislation National Monument status for these lands, which are adjacent to and near Grand Canyon National Park.

The Bureau has also been raising its profile as a provider of recreation, attracting 61 million visits to BLM lands in 1997 -- an increase of nearly 20 percent since 1994.

It is not surprising, then, that outdoor recreationists and other non-commodity users of the public lands have substantially broadened the BLM's traditional rural constituency. This new constituency reflects the West's changing demographics and the growing phenomenon of wildland-urban interface. Given the BLM's growing conservation and recreation portfolio, and in light of the many partnerships that the Bureau has formed with recreational, conservation, and other non-commodity groups, the BLM can no longer be fairly tagged as the "Bureau of Livestock and Mining."

Conclusion

I began my remarks by quoting Governor Andrus on politics being "the art of compromise" and that Westerners "understand you need to first make a living, but then you have to have a life that's worth living."

Along these same lines, Western writer Wallace Stegner expressed confidence that the American West would one day succeed in achieving the grand compromise of balancing the need for development with the need for conservation. He wrote: "I believe that eventually, perhaps within a generation or two, they [the people of the West] will work out some sort of compromise

between what must be done to earn a living and what must be done to restore health to the earth, air, and water."*

From *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs* (1992), p. xxii. This book was published the year before Stegner's death.

This type of balance is already built in to the conservation-and-development mission that Congress has given the BLM. So as it carries out its complex mission, the BLM is ensuring the health, productivity, and open space of 264 million acres of public lands. *And this open space truly serves the Western need "to have a life that's worth living."*

As the principal steward of our nation's public lands, the BLM is committed to passing on an irreplaceable natural resource legacy to future generations of Americans. By working in partnership with all who use or care about the public lands, the BLM will fulfill that commitment.

###